

Good morning. I would like to begin by saying how grateful I am to live in a community where our veterans are respected on this special day and every day. That says a lot about your values and the values of our community.

Over the years the Waco VA hospital, what it stands for, the veterans it serves and those who work here, have come to mean a great deal to me.

That is why I appreciate, more than you know, the invitation to be with you today.

I come here, with a deep sense of gratitude and humility, to salute our veterans and to say thank you.

To each of you, whether you are a veteran, a veteran's family member or a citizen showing your appreciation to our veterans, thank you for being here. Over the years we have never been able to predict the Waco weather on Veterans Day—sometimes it's been mild and other times freezing cold—but one thing has never changed—the citizens of Central Texas have come here every year to remind us all of the true meaning of Veterans Day.

To our veterans, thank you for making ours the greatest nation in the world—with freedoms and opportunities that most people throughout human history could only dream about.

I understand the economic and political challenges facing our country. They are real—for our families and our future. But, on this day, Veterans Day, let us remember all of the blessings of our nation. After all, think about it if you would. Our immigration problem is not that people are trying to leave our country, it is that so many people would do almost anything to get here. That, itself, is proof that, thanks to our veterans, America is still a beacon of hope and freedom for people from all across the world.

Our founding fathers understood that freedom is a divine gift—it is God-given. They also understood, as we understand today, that America's veterans are the stewards of that sacred

freedom.

And, what incredible stewards you have been—from the first shots at Lexington and Concord to Flanders Fields—from the beaches of Normandy to the sands of Iwo Jima—from the frigid mountains of Korea to the steaming jungles of Viet Nam—from the arid heat of Iraq to the numbing cold of Afghanistan's rugged terrain—from every generation, from every walk of life, from every race, religion and creed, America's veterans have always answered our nation's call to duty.

Our nation's founding documents—the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights are protected in our National Archives, but let there be no doubt that the true protectors of the freedom described in those documents are our veterans, past, present and future.

From one generation to the next, America's veterans have heeded the moving words of John McRae from Flanders Fields "To you from failing hands we throw the torch; be yours to hold it high."

When called to duty, America's vets have always stood tall and held high the torch of freedom. Our servicemen and women have always risen to meet the responsibility of protecting our nation, and they always will.

As a father of two young sons, I say thank you to our veterans for making our country and our world a better, safer place through your service. You have been good and faithful stewards in protecting God's gift of human freedom for our families here in America and for countless others across the world.

Now, it is our nation's responsibility to stand up for those who have stood up for us—to keep our promise to those of you who have kept your promise.

It is my hope that the Waco VA hospital will always stand as a reminder of those who have served in uniform and a reminder that their personal sacrifices do not end with the signing of a

cease fire agreement.

To our dedicated VA employees, thank you for giving both care and love to our veterans, not just on this special day, but every day. Through your work, you speak for all Americans in giving our veterans something that they deserve above all else: our respect.

It is my hope and prayer that the hallowed grounds of our military and VA cemeteries will always stand as a humbling reminder that so many have given, in the words of Lincoln, “their last full measure of devotion to country.”

On Veterans Day, and every day, I would ask that we never forget the daily personal sacrifices of the unsung heroes of our nation’s defense—the families of our servicemen and women and our veterans. Perhaps they have not worn our nation’s uniform, but through their personal sacrifice—they, too, have truly served us all. For that, we thank you and salute you.

I want to thank our veterans and the people of Central Texas for giving me the privilege of working for you and with you over the past 20 years.

It has been the greatest and most humbling privilege of my years in public service to get to know the incredible men and women who have put on our nation’s uniform and gone into harm’s way.

In representing Ft. Hood and the Waco and Temple VA hospitals, I have seen first-hand the sacrifices of our servicemen and women and their families, in times of war and in times of peace.

Time and again I have seen in them the personification of the American spirit. I will never forget the young soldier who missed the births of his two children, because of his service in Iraq and then Bosnia. There are no make-up days for missed births, anniversaries and special moments lost with family.

I will never forget the 29-year-old widow clutching her newborn baby in her arms, an infant who would never feel the hugs of her father, because he had given his life to country in Iraq. You know what that young widow asked me? She asked how she could help other young widows deal with their loss.

I will never forget the parents I met at Ft. Hood who had lost two sons in Iraq in less than two weeks. How does one measure that kind of sacrifice for country?

I will never forget Gunny Armstrong, an Army Sergeant at Walter Reed Hospital, who had lost an eye and a leg while protecting a children's medical center near Bagdad yet felt bad because he could not be back there protecting his fellow soldiers.

And, I will never forget Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry, a husband and father of three children under the age of 10, who gave his life in Al Anbar province just one week before coming home, because he volunteered to diffuse three roadside bombs, when all he had to do was just wait for his plane ride back home.

I have been humbled and inspired by these heroes and by the unheralded everyday heroes—our veterans who do their duty and then come home and find ways to continue their service to community and country, whether it is helping fellow veterans in need or fighting to save the Waco VA hospital.

I can never even come close to repaying the debt of gratitude I owe to our troops, our veterans and your families.

Together, I hope we have made a meaningful down payment on that debt.

From the bottom of my heart, I thank each of you for giving me the privilege of trying to give just a little bit back to those who have given me and my family far more than I could ever give them. It has been an honor every single day.

As we look to the future of our great country, let us remember that behind the walls of this VA hospital, even as we speak, those who served yesterday are still paying the price today of their physical and mental wounds of combat. Long after their fight on the battlefield is over, many of our veterans have to keep fighting against the physical and mental wounds of war. We must have their back in that fight.

Let us also remember that tomorrow's veterans are serving us today in harm's way in Iraq and Afghanistan and all across the world. We cannot and shall not forget them when they come home.

My hope and prayer for our country is that we always remember we are the land of the free, because we are still the home of the brave. May God bless our veterans and their families who have protected our great nation and protected His divine gift of human freedom. And, may God always bless America, the land we love. Thank you.